

# Bad Family

A Steve Hickey game, 17<sup>th</sup> of April 2008

Introduction .....	1
Choose a Family Member .....	1
Introduce your family member .....	2
Set up your Star Sheet .....	3
Allocate the Roles .....	4
Choose the type of Scene .....	4
Star Scenes .....	5
The Flip .....	5
How to Adjust the Flip .....	5
Ending a Star Scene .....	6
Helping Scenes .....	6
Subsequent Scenes .....	8
Once you reach your Want .....	8
Ending the Game .....	9
What did you Win ? .....	9
The Next Episode .....	10
Appendix 1: Resolve Ties .....	10

## Introduction

In this game everyone takes turns playing one of the Stars in a sit-com about a family.

You'll need:

- 3 or 4 close friends, ones you'd be comfortable telling jokes/funny stories/being silly with
- a pack of cards, with the jokers removed
- a coin for each player
- a bowl with quite a lot of tokens in it
- copies of the Star Sheet on page \*\*\* Give everyone a copy of this
- copies of the Role Cards on pages \*\*\* to \*\*\*
- a blank sheet of paper for your Family Chart

## Choose a Family Member

Put the list on the next page out on the table. Give everyone a chance to study it. Then, at the same time, have everyone point to who they want to play.

If there's a tie, check out Appendix 1 for details on how to resolve it.

On this list, each Family Member has a number beside them - that's their **Rank**. Rank 1 is higher than Rank 7.

## INTRODUCE YOUR FAMILY MEMBER

Starting with the player who has the highest-ranked Family Member, go round the table and introduce your Family Member by name. Explain what role they play in the family, and talk a little bit about why you chose them.

## SELECT YOUR STAR'S WANT

Each player is responsible for selecting a **Want** for their Family Member. A Want is an over-riding goal for the episode you're about to play. Examples Wants include:

- Frame someone for your screw-up at work
- Prove to your kids that you're hip
- See Trinity Sachko naked
- Climb the big tree in your backyard
- Get the Mafia boss to cancel your debt to him

The process for choosing Wants is to THINK about it, DISCUSS it, and then to FINALISE it.

### Think about it

Someone should read out the following questions:

- Do you have a gut instinct about what your Family Member would Want?
- If not, what inspired you to choose this Family Member?
- What's the biggest problem you think they'd face with that?
- Are you interested in playing through that for a couple of scenes?

Got something? If not, listen to other peoples' ideas during the "Discuss it" phase.

### Discuss it

People who have come up with a Want, say what it is.

People who haven't, share any ideas you came up with or talk about why you're having a problem. Everyone else, go through the 'Think about it' questions for that Family Member, and come up with some suggestions.

**NB:** You have absolutely final say over what your Star Wants. You need to be excited by it.

Remember, the Wants aren't finalised yet. You've still got some points to talk about:

- Does your Want involve other Family Members? That means you'll spend a lot of the game hanging out with your family. On the other hand, if your Want has nothing to do with the

rest of your family, then your plot will be fairly separate from everybody else's. Both options work fine, but it's good to be aware of it.

- When your Want involves other players, remember - Wants that are active (River wants to reunite her Dad with his Grandfather) are easier to play than Wants that are reactive (River wants to hide her shameful new job from her family). It's easier to push into someone else's story than it is to convince other players to push into yours.
- A game of Bad Family tends to have a sit-com feel, but if you want a more serious tone, you can discuss it now.
- If you want, you can ensure that the Wants have similar stakes. For instance, there's going to be quite a difference if someone's Want is "Find and defuse the nuclear bomb I lost" and someone else's is "Find friends to come to my birthday party." On the other hand, that difference has the potential to be really funny.
- If you want, you can make the Wants have a similar tone (Simpsons, or Malcolm in the Middle, or Family Guy, etc.) and rating (kid-friendly, family viewing, adults-only). However, I've had lots of successful games where these differences meant the episodes had their own unique vibe.
- If two Family Members want something that's mutually exclusive (such as "to marry Jane"), the game still plays normally. In each Family Member's scene, they may or may not get closer to what they Want. In effect, the two family members are jostling, trying to get one up on the other, until one of them finally wins. However, if they both get what they Want use your imagination to come up with a suitable explanation for how that works.

If two Family Members want the same thing, and it's not mutually exclusive (such as "to frame each other for the screw-up at work"), play the game as normal.

### Finalise it

Everyone writes down the Want they've chosen on their Star sheet.

## Set up your Star Sheet

Everybody takes a Token from the bowl and puts it in one of the circles in the Bonus column of their Star sheet. This gives you 1 Bonus, which you can spend, later in the game, to affect your luck.

Now put a Coin on the Failure Column of your Star sheet, on top of the number '1'.

Circle '2' on the Success column. That's what you're trying to get your Coin above. This number is called your "Want Level". So, at the moment, you have a Want Level of '2'.

## Allocate The Roles

Hand out the appropriate Role Cards (see the following pages).

Give the **Star** card (see next page) to the player with the highest-ranked Family Member. They become the Star - the first scene will focus on them and their Want. Give the **Family** card to the Star as well.

The player to the Star's left (who's about to have their turn) becomes the **Supporter**. Their job is to ask the Star how they're trying to get what they want. Give them the Supporter card and a Cast card.

Everyone else is in the **Cast**. They play everyone and everything that the Star meets. Give them Cast cards.

Put the card for the **Knock** in the middle of the table. It's the job of whoever claims this to end the scene and try to make the Star's life difficult. They get a Bonus for doing this (which will help them succeed in the game). You might want to read out the instructions on the Knock card now (page \*\*\*), just to make sure everyone understands it.

Now you're about to start the game, keep two principles in mind:

### The rule of 'Continuity'

When things get tricky to connect, the whole table can usually figure out a way to make it work.

Sometimes things'll happen in this game that don't seem to make a damn bit of sense. People might be in two places at once, or one player's plot might be set over a single night while another's spans a couple of weeks.

My advice is to roll with it. There's an intuitive continuity to episodes of *Bad Family*, and when things get tricky to connect the whole table can usually figure out a way to explain it – maybe through the use of flashbacks or another TV story-telling device. And if that fails, ... just ignore it. *Bad Family* isn't a game about water-tight logic; it's about families - and nobody understands them.

### The rule of 'Cut!'

If something happens that you don't like (or you feel uncomfortable with), yell "Cut!".

Discuss it with the other players and reach some agreement about how to proceed. Then yell "Take 2!", and restart the game.

## Starting The Game

As mentioned on the Role Cards, the person with the Supporter card asks the Star what type

of scene they want.

**Star Scenes** centre around the Star trying to achieve their Want (see below).

**Helping Scenes** involve the Star trying to help another Family Member, and allows them to earn Bonuses (see page 6).

## Star Scenes

In a Star Scene, the Star describes how they try to get what Want.

The scene continues until someone is inspired to knock on the table and suggest a worst-case scenario for the Star.

**EXAMPLE:** Lee Wilson wants to prove he's not gay. Lee's player describes how Lee meets a beautiful girl at a party and has the opportunity to sleep with her. The Knock thinks that's a great direction for the story to go in, and then describes the worst-case scenario - that Lee's stalker, a male high-school student, gatecrashes and declares his love for Lee in front of everyone.

That person (who's just knocked) picks up the Knock card and – following its instructions – restates what will happen if the Star succeeds (changing nothing about what the Star said). The Knock then suggests their own worst-case scenario for what happens if the Star fails, a worst-case scenario that takes the Star further away from what they Want.

**NB:** It's good to make sure, whatever happens, the story advances in an interesting way.

Once those two options are clear to everyone, the Star flips over the top card of the deck.

## The Flip

If the result is Red, the Star moves their Token up one space on the column they're on.

If the result is Black, the Star swaps their Token over to the other column, keeping it at the same level.

[EXAMPLE]

**NB:** If you ever go past your Want Level (on either the Success or Failure column), then you have succeeded or failed to achieve your Star's Want (see page \*\*\*).

## Adjust The Flip - if you want

You can spend a Bonus to Flip another card, if you don't like the result.  
You can spend as many Bonuses to re-Flip.

You can choose to use a Bonus after you've seen what the result of the original Flip is.

Other people can give you Bonuses too.

Once the Star has flipped the card, any other player may donate one of their Bonuses to the Star. This gives the Star another Flip, which cannot be refused.

**NB:** You could force the Star to re-Flip a success, if you wanted to.

When you hand over your Bonus to the Star, say "But then," and describe the event that provokes the extra Flip. You must weave an element from your Family Member's story into this description.

[EXAMPLE:]

## Continuing The Star Scene

You can also spend a Bonus to continue your Star scene after you have had your Flip.

Make sure the Cast have spent all of the Bonuses to adjust the Flip they wanted to. Then simply pay a Bonus. This lets you (the Star) continue describing how you act to get what you want. At some point, one of the Cast will Knock again.

## Ending a Star Scene

After making the Flip, and swapping tracks if necessary, all the Roles shift round one position (so the Supporter becomes the Star, and the Star becomes a member of the Cast).

The current Star's scene ends. The next Star's scene begins with the new Supporter asking their questions, starting with whether the Star would like a Star scene or a Helping scene.

QUESTION FOR READERS: Is the lack of resolution in a scene annoying? Have you got any ideas how scenes should be finished up inside the fictional TV show you're creating?

## Helping Scenes

The object of a Helping Scene is for you to describe how the Star helps out another Family Member. Think of this as a quieter, more relationship-focused scene in the episode.

The Star chooses another player to help (the Target).

Both of you pretend to be your Family Members, and act out a conversation between them, discussing the Target's problem. The scene only involves the two of you. No-one else.

The Star's character doesn't need to intend to help or even know they're helping. However, the scene should be interpretable as having helped.

The Helping Scene ends either when the Star and the Target agree it's gone on long enough, or the Knock knocks on the table.

**NB:** Helping Scenes can go on for quite a while, but the Knock still controls the pace of the game. They can decide when the scene has reached an appropriate conclusion. While you're still trying to get what you Want, you can only have one Helping Scene with each Family Member per episode. Once a player's achieved their Want, they are allowed to start Helping Scenes with whoever they want, as often as they want. These are not recorded on the Family Chart (see below).

The Target chooses between taking another Flip right now or taking 2 Bonuses.

If they Flip, they can use Bonuses to adjust the roll, as normal.

If they take 2 Bonuses, they then have to choose whether to keep both of them for themselves, or give one to the Star who helped them.

**NB:** If the Target chooses to Flip, they don't get any Bonuses.

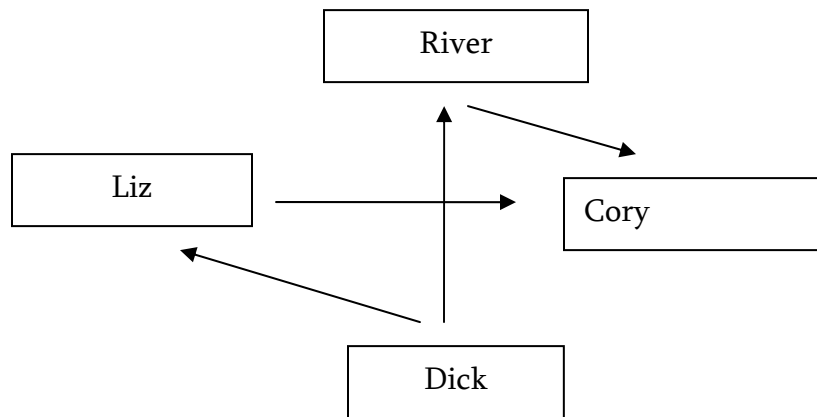
If the Target then crosses to the Success column (or moves up the Success column), then that represents good advice or help during this Helping Scene. Failure represents bad advice.

The Target starts their next Star scene in the same predicament as they finished their last turn. However, they should feel free to slip in the results of the Helping Scene as they describe what happens to them.

## The Family Chart

Perhaps the most important part of a game of Bad Family is the Family Chart.

You use the Family Chart to keep track of helping scenes. Write the names of every Family Member who's being played onto a piece of paper. Draw lines between those who've had Helping Scenes together. Use arrows to indicate who initiated the scenes.



In the example above, Dick has helped Liz and River. Liz has helped Cory, and she's been helped by Dick.

You can write all the other cast members and locations you invent during the game onto the Family Chart - making it easier for you to reincorporate them into future scenes or episodes.

**NB:** Use the Family list as inspiration for other characters. Simply choose who you do or don't want to see, and add them into Star scenes.

## Family Scenes

Once everyone's had a turn as Star (this is called a 'round'), you have the option of asking for an Family Scene. In this scene there is no Flipping of coins, and no getting closer or further away from what you Want. There's just a conversation between everybody's Family Members. The scene goes on until somebody says they'd like to finish it.

You have the option of calling for an Family Scene at the start of each new round.

## Subsequent Scenes

From the second round onwards, the Supporter asks a series of questions to re-establish the Star's situation.

## Once you Reach your Want

If you reach your Want Level on the Success column and then Succeed on your next Flip, you win. Your Family Member gets what they want. Before you make your Flip, you should set up a situation where getting your Want could come about

You fail to get what you Want if you reach your Want Level on the Failure column, and then Fail on your next Flip.



**EXAMPLE:** Andrew has a Want Level of 2. He's just reached '2' on the Failure column and flips Tails. He has no Bonuses to call on, so he moves up to '3' on the Failure column, and fails.

Players who have finished still take their turns as Supporter, Knock, and Cast Member. When it's their turn for a Star scene, they can either:

- pass their turn to the next player, or
- call for a Helping Scene with anyone. Don't record these on the Family Chart.

As the Knock, they can earn and spend Bonuses as normal.

## Ending The Game

Once half the players have finished, there is one final round of scenes.

**EXAMPLE:** With four players, you start the final round after 2 people have gotten (or not) their Want. With five players, it starts after 3 people have gotten (or not) their Want.

Only play out the scenes for the remaining still-active Stars. [THIS IS SOMETHING I'M EXPERIMENTING WITH -- The intent is to give the endgame a sense of pace.] Once this final round of scenes has finished, wrap everything up with a final Family Scene.

After everyone has finished, keep all your Bonuses for the moment.

## What did you Win ?

If you succeeded, your new Want Level increases by 1.

If you failed, your new Want Level decreases by 1 (to a minimum of 1).

If you neither succeeded or failed, your Want Level stays the same.

The number of Bonuses you start of the next episode with equals *the number of Helping Scenes you started* <minus> *the number of Helping Scenes you were helped in*. Use the Family Chart to work that out.

QUESTION: I feel like the number of Bonuses you finish with should affect something in the next episode, ... but what?

## The Next Episode

You can change Family Members if you want. Choose from unselected Family Members.

Choose a new Want for your Family Member. These can either be exactly the same, a continuation of what happened in the previous episode, or something completely new.

Assign the Star Card to the player with the highest Want Level. If there's a tie, the highest-ranked Family Member gets the cards. Assign the rest of the Role Cards as normal (see page 6).

## Appendix I: Resolve Ties

If 2 (or more) players want the same Family Member, resolve ties by comparing the players' surnames to 'Jones'.

Whose surname has the nearest to the same number of letters as “Jones”?

Whose surname starts with the letter closest to 'J'?

Whose first name starts with the letter closest to 'J'?

Here's a table to help you calculate those last 2 questions:

12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
X	Y	Z	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	W

If there are multiple ties for Family Members (for instance Gino and Viv both want to play Dick Jones, while Sean and Helen both want to play River Jones), then each tie is resolved separately. Start with the lowest Ranked Family Member and go through to the highest.

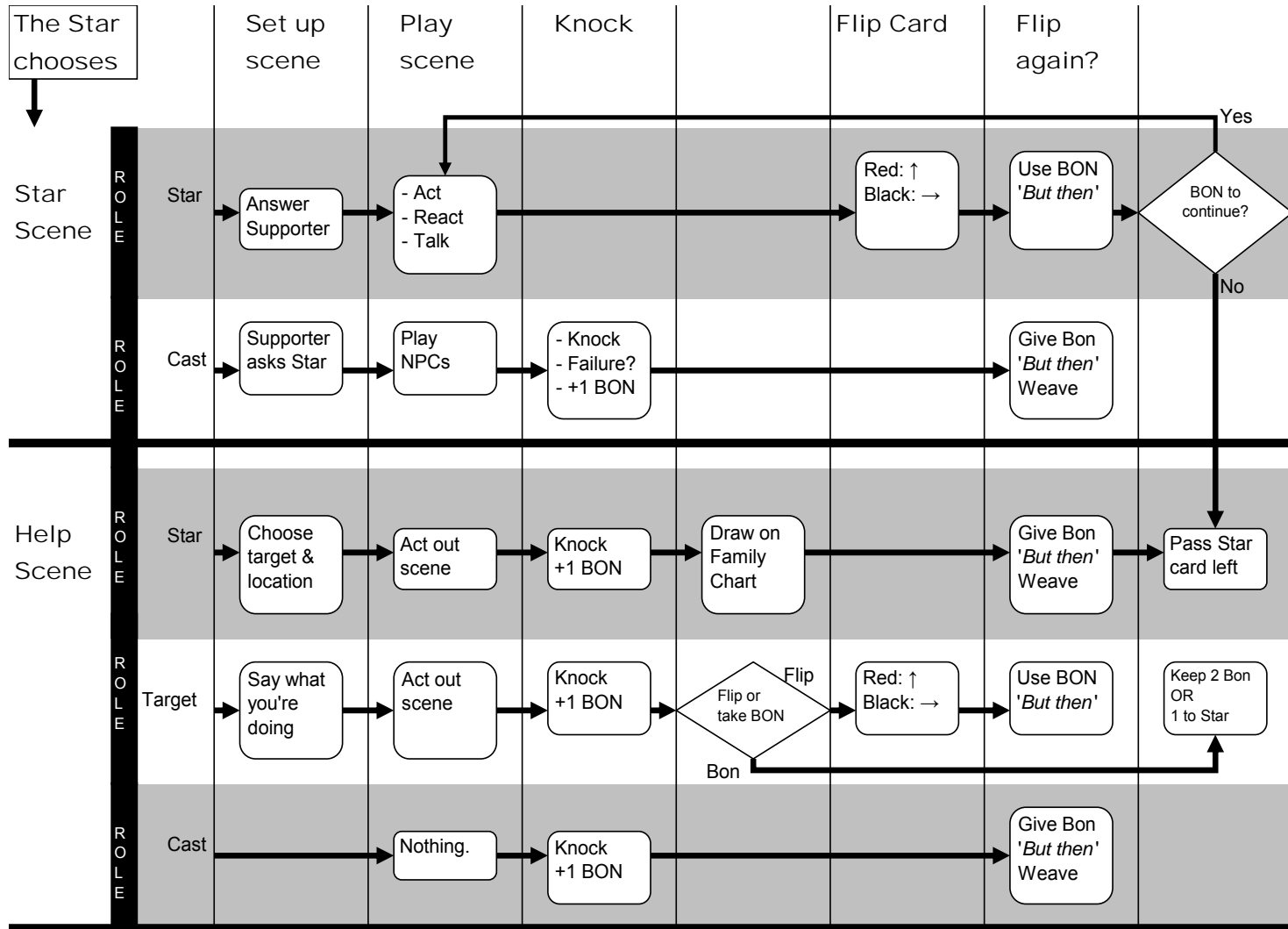
In the above example, you'd resolve the tie for Dick Jones, then the tie for River.

After resolving a tie, the player(s) who didn't get the Family Members they wanted can choose again. You then resolve the next-highest tie following the same process.

Each player chooses a Family Member from this list.

1. River Jones: Youngest child.
2. Cory Sachko: Close family friend & workmate.
3. Dick Jones: Father.
4. Bry Walker: Best friend living at the Joneses.
5. Lee Wilson: Adopted child.
6. Tony Heard: Cousin.
7. Annabel Jones: Grandmother.
8. Jamie Jones: Middle Child.
9. Elizabeth (Liz or Beth) Jones: Mother.
10. Alex Jones: Oldest child.
11. Randolph (Randy) Jones: Grandfather.
12. Baby: Infant.

## The Star Sheet



Name :

Want :

What  
have you  
learned  
this  
episode?

Success

Failure

4

4

3

3

2

2

1

1

Pass

---

# Bad Family: The Star

Your job is to describe how your Family Member tries to get what they Want.

1. Listen to the Supporter and answer their questions.
2. If you want to try and advance up the Success Track, ask for a Star Scene. If you want to help another Family Member (and earn Bonuses), ask for a Helping Scene.

## *If you choose a Star Scene:*

1. Listen to the Supporter and answer their questions.
2. Think up an interesting way for your Family Member to start (or continue) trying to get what they Want.
3. Describe how you try to get what you Want. For instance, *“I give my boss a birthday present,”* or *“I tell the school bully she’s mean for not inviting me to her birthday.”*
4. Listen to the Supporter’s questions and use their ideas if you like them. If the Cast introduces characters, interact with them if you like them.
5. Once the Knock has suggested their worst-case scenario, Flip a card from the top of the deck.

If it’s Red, move the coin up 1 number.

If it’s Black, swap your coin to the opposite column, keeping the coin on the same number. *e.g. If you’re at Success 2, swap to Failure 2.*

6. You can use a Bonus to re-Flip a failed result. You can use as many Bonuses as you want on one turn, and you can choose whether to use them after you’ve seen the result. A used Bonus goes back into the bowl.
7. If the coin goes above your Want Level (on either the Success or Failure column), you’ve succeeded or failed to get what you Wanted.

## *If you choose a Helping Scene:*

1. Choose a Family Member to help (the Target) and then have a conversation with them about their predicament.
  2. Someone will knock once you’ve helped the Target. Feel free to suggest if the scene feels finished to you.
  3. You add 1 Bonus to your Star sheet. You do not Flip the Card.
-

---

## Bad Family: The Supporter

Your job is to ask the Star questions about how they try to get what they want.

1. At the start of each scene, ask the Star:
  - *Is this a Star scene or a Helping Scene?*
  - *What's your Want?*
  - *How do we start? (or, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> scene, 'Where did we leave you?')*
  - *What happens next?*
2. Assume the Star succeeds at whatever they do, and ask them questions like, "*And then what happens?*".
3. Provide ideas for the Star to bounce off ( "*And when that happens, do you go and see anyone?*").
4. Ask difficult questions ( "*Does anyone see you steal that?*").

**NB:** You're not a narrator; you never directly say what happens. You ask suggestive questions. It's up to the Star whether to accept those suggestions.

### What do you do during Helping Scenes?

1. Before the scene starts, remind the Star and the Target that they can agree to end the scene if they think it's served its purpose. Otherwise, the Knock will end it.
  2. Nothing. Just let the Star have a conversation with whoever they're helping.
  3. When the scene's finished, make sure everyone's got their Bonuses.
  4. Ask the Target of the Helping Scene if they want to spend both their Bonuses now, to buy a re-Flip.
- 
- 

## Bad Family: The Cast

Your job is to act out the conversations and reactions of every character the Star meets.

1. You can play your own Family Member, unallocated Family Members, random strangers, inanimate objects, animals & the weather. Anyone the Star introduces.
2. You don't have to wait till the Star introduces a supporting character. Introduce whoever you like.

**NB:** If the Star isn't interested in your idea or moves the action away from it, let them. Your job is also to make the Star's scene fun for them.

### What do you do in a Helping Scene?

Nothing. Don't introduce any other cast members or events. Let the scene be about the Star and the person they're helping.

---

---

## **Bad Family: The Knock**

Your job is to introduce conflict into the game during Star scenes. You also control when Family and Family Scenes end.

**NB:** The Star cannot be the Knock.  
You can't be the Knock twice in a row.

### **What do you do during Star Scenes?**

1. The moment the Star takes a big step towards getting what they Want – but it's a step with the potential for lots of things to go wrong - literally knock on the table. Restate what the Star just said (don't change anything). Then suggest what will happen if the Star **FAILS**.

**NB:** Your suggestion should make it more difficult for the Star to get what they Want.

2. Tell the Star to flip a coin.
3. Add 1 Bonus to your Star sheet.

### **What do you do during Helping Scenes and Family Scenes?**

1. Knock on the table as soon as you think the Star has helped (or hurt) enough, or the family has talked enough.
2. Add 1 Bonus to your Star sheet.

**NB:** You don't need to come up with a cliffhanger – just knock at a good end point.

3. Remind the Star not to Flip their coin.
  4. Record who was helped (and by who) on the Family Chart.
- 
- 

## **Bad Family: The Cast**

Your job is to act out the conversations and reactions of every character the Star meets.

1. You can play your own Family Member, unallocated Family Members, random strangers, inanimate objects, animals & the weather. Anyone the Star introduces.
2. You don't have to wait till the Star introduces a supporting character. Introduce whoever you like.

**NB:** If the Star isn't interested in your idea or moves the action away from it, let them. Your job is also to make the Star's scene fun for them.

### **What do you do in a Helping Scene?**

Nothing. Don't introduce any other cast members or events. Let the scene be about the Star and the person they're helping.

---



---



---

## Bad Family: Family Scenes

Once you've had your second star scene after receiving this card, have a scene involving all the family members.

To start – each player adds one fact about where the scene is set.

The scene continues in this location as a conversation between all your family members.

**NB:** Players can opt out of this scene if they want.

The scene ends when someone picks up the Knock card and knocks.

The Knock doesn't have to come up with a Worst Case Scenario to end the scene. They just claim the Bonus.

Once you've finished the Family Scene, pass this card to the player on your left, along with the Star Card

---



---

## Bad Family: The Cast

Your job is to act out the conversations and reactions of every character the Star meets.

3. You can play your own Family Member, unallocated Family Members, random strangers, inanimate objects, animals & the weather. Anyone the Star introduces.
4. You don't have to wait till the Star introduces a supporting character. Introduce whoever you like.

**NB:** If the Star isn't interested in your idea or moves the action away from it, let them. Your job is also to make the Star's scene fun for them.

### *What do you do in a Helping Scene?*

Nothing. Don't introduce any other cast members or events. Let the scene be about the Star and the person they're helping.

---